

Correspondence

Violence in America

TO THE EDITOR: Laurence D. Chu, MS, and Susan B. Sorenson, PhD, begin their study of homicide trends in California by stating that the United States leads industrialized nations with the highest homicide rate.¹ We frequently see similar claims in both scientific and lay publications, often accompanied by statements such as, "Violence is as American as apple pie." Table 1 lists the suicide and homicide rates for all 76 nations that release these data.² The figures are for the most recent available year.

In fact, 13 nations admit to higher homicide rates: Bahamas, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Philippines, Puerto Rico, Russia, and Venezuela. Belarus, Latvia,

Lithuania, and Ukraine come close. (Three nations including Russia have both higher suicide and higher homicide rates.) Violence is a serious problem: America clearly has too much. Nevertheless, the seriousness of a problem does not justify inaccurate statements.

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REFERENCES

- Chu LD, Sorenson SB: Trends in California homicide, 1970 to 1993. West J Med 1996; 165:119-125
- 1993 Demographic Yearbook. New York, NY, United Nations, 1995

TABLE 1.—Rates of Suicide and Homicide per 100,000 Population in 76 Nations

Nation	Rates		Nation	Rates	
	Suicide	Homicide		Suicide	Homicide
Albania	1.4	3.9	Korea, South	7.1	1.4
Argentina	6.6	5.0	Kuwait	0.9	0.5
Armenia	2.6	5.7	Kyrgyzstan	12.4	13.9*
Australia	12.0	1.6	Latvia	26.0*	9.2
Austria	22.3*	1.5	Lithuania	26.0*	7.5
Bahamas	1.2	10.8*	Luxembourg	15.1*	2.1
Bahrain	3.1	0.4	Macao	8.1	1.9
Barbados	4.7	7.1	Malta	5.0	1.7
Belarus	20.3*	6.9	Martinique	12.8*	4.3
Belgium	19.3*	1.4	Mauritius	13.9*	2.1
Brazil	3.2	20.2*	Mexico	2.4	17.2*
Bulgaria	16.9*	4.5	Netherlands	10.7	1.2
Canada	12.8*	2.2	New Zealand	13.9*	1.9
Cape Verde	2.4	1.7	Nicaragua	2.7	5.7
Chile	5.6	2.9	Norway	15.8*	1.5
China	17.6*	1.4	Panama	3.0	5.2
Colombia	2.7	74.4*	Philippines	0.5	19.5*
Costa Rica	4.2	4.2	Poland	14.9*	2.9
Czechoslovakia	17.1*	2.1	Portugal	8.8	1.5
Denmark	22.0*	5.0	Puerto Rico	10.0	22.6*
Dominican Republic	2.1	4.8	Romania	11.6	4.9
Ecuador	4.4	10.3*	Russia	26.6*	15.3*
Egypt	0.0	0.5	Sao Tome	0.9	2.8
El Salvador	11.3	28.1*	Singapore	11.6	1.8
Estonia	27.1*	11.0*	Slovenia	32.3*	2.5
Finland	28.8*	3.4	Spain	7.5	1.0
France	20.2*	1.1	Suriname	13.4*	3.6
Germany	16.7*	1.2	Sweden	17.2*	1.3
Greece	3.7	1.4	Switzerland	20.8*	5.2
Guatemala	0.5	3.3	Trinidad	12.0	7.7
Guyana	1.7	0.3	Ukraine	20.6*	8.0
Hong Kong	13.0*	1.8	United Kingdom	8.0	0.9
Hungary	38.7*	4.0	United States	12.4	9.8
Iceland	10.7	1.1	Uruguay	10.3	4.4
Ireland	9.8	0.6	Venezuela	4.8	12.1*
Israel	7.3	1.2	Yugoslavia	15.3*	2.0
Italy	7.8	2.9	Zimbabwe	7.5	6.9
Japan	16.8*	0.6			
Kazakhstan	19.1*	11.8*			

*Figure exceeds US figures.